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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001759

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS JEOPARDIZED BY ARMY REFORM PROBLEM, SAYS

[1](#)S. KIVU GENERAL

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.5 B and D

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Gen. Budja Mabe, Kinshasa's senior officer in South Kivu, told the Ambassador Sept. 8 the Congo needs outside help with military reform in order to be able to hold elections. The FDLR, rebel Congolese officers, and neighboring countries are the chief threats to security, and the non-Banyamulenge of Uvira are not keen to see the Banyamulenge return--a problem that has deep roots. Mabe came across as intelligent and articulate, if not completely forthcoming, and likely with the sense to tailor his message to his USG audience, qualities lacking in many FARDC officers. He appears to want to engage with the USG. END COMMENT.

A Motley Collection of Forces

[1](#)2. (C) 10th Military Region commander Gen. Felix Budja Mabe told the Ambassador Sept. 8 he has made some progress on military integration, but that the Congolese need outside support for further reform. Without an effective army, there will be no security and therefore no elections. His troops include elements from the former government, RCD-Goma, local defense forces, Mudundu-40 and the Mai-Mai. On the plus side, he claimed Kinshasa authorities are providing consistent (but small) salary payments, discipline is "sixty percent there," and people are beginning to respect the chain of command. Incompetence is a major problem, however, especially among the Mai-Mai. Mai-Mai groups are organized by clan or locality, and their untrained leaders do not deserve their rank. It would be best to wait until after elections to begin demobilizing them, he advised, because most Mai-Mai are unqualified to serve in the regular army and could become a source of instability when they are cut.

Military Threats

[1](#)3. (C) Mabe said the major threats to South Kivu are the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, aka ex-FAR/Interahamwe), neighboring countries, renegade former RCD-Goma officers Laurent Nkunda and Jules Mutebusi, and "the 8th Military Region." (Comment: This is probably a reference to Goma-based 8th Military Region commander Gen. Obedi Rwibasira, who is widely believed to have supported Nkunda and Mutebusi in their recent revolt. End Comment.) In Mabe's view, many if not most FDLR fighters are willing to disarm voluntarily and return to Rwanda, but a hard-core minority--including most of the senior leaders--restrains them. Overall FDLR strength in the Congo is probably five brigades, he estimated, a maximum of 15,000 troops if they were at full strength. Mabe spoke little about Nkunda, other than saying the latter's troops attacked government forces 2-3 days earlier but failed to reach their objectives, the areas of Kalehe and Kavumu.

Longstanding Tensions in Uvira

[1](#)4. (C) Discussing the situation at Uvira, Mabe said that after the Banyamulenge community there fled across the border, squatters moved into their homes. This, plus the fact that many non-Banyamulenge long felt that the Banyamulenge had "tried to dominate them," means that those remaining in Uvira are "not excited" about the prospect of Banyamulenge refugees returning to the city. Tensions between Banyamulenge and other Congolese in South Kivu also stem from long-running land disputes, Mabe explained, because the Banyamulenge living in the Haut-Plateau area have had a tendency to settle in the mid- and lower Plateau areas as well. There have been fights over this since as early as 1964; Mobutu had seen fit to station a full battalion of troops in the area to quell violence.

COMMENT

[1](#)5. (C) Mabe came across as an intelligent, articulate military officer with a good understanding of political dynamics--a contrast with many other Congolese officers. He conveyed the appearance of wanting to engage with the U.S., and indeed increase future cooperation. He was not fully forthcoming, however, claiming that his troops are being regularly paid (they are not). Nor did he mention impending

military action within a short time of this meeting, apparently designed to move FARDC troops under his command further toward boundaries with the neighboring 8th Military Region, reclaiming ground controlled by dissident rebel General Nkunda. Instead, he implied that all current clashes result from Nkunda initiatives. Mabe was direct in characterizing Interahamwe forces in his military district as a major security threat to the region and the resident population, asserting that he fully intended to maintain operations against Hutu extremists (e.g. FDLR, Interahamwe). He also avoided any inflammatory language regarding RCD-Goma or Banyamulenge (South Kivu Tutsi) troops. Mabe has certainly been identified, however, as a major problem by RCD-Goma and some Congolese Tutsis, as well as by Kigali, so how much of his presentation was constructed for his USG audience and how much reflects true personal feeling is difficult to assess. Whatever his actual feelings about the current military environment in the Kivus, Mabe's comments about the need for external assistance for Congolese military reform are on the mark. While increased pressure is needed to force the Congolese parties to further significant military integration moves, it is also true that current external support appears inadequate and not well coordinated between key parties, including South Africa and Belgium. END COMMENT.

MEECE